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Salt

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
School for American Crafts
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts,
Metals and Jewelry Design

Salt

by

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Abstract

Memory and experience play an important role in the creation of my thesis work. I often reflect on moments that leave an impression on me. I think these really touch my feelings and shape my creative mind. The feelings are always plain, they do not say anything, and do not unassuming, buried very deep. I see my jewelry pieces as small sculptures that carry stories, documenting important times and feelings that I experienced in my life.

For my thesis, I play and experiment with salt crystal and metal. For me, the growth of crystal is the same as the growth of a person. People continue to absorb others' life experiences and advice in order to help themselves figure out the right way in their life.

China has an old saying that old people often offer to young people "I have eaten more salt than you have rice." In Asian culture, rice is the staple for most of our meals. To say that someone has eaten more salt than you have of rice shows that they have been around and gone through a great deal more than you and we should respect their wealth of life experience.

In my art, salt becomes symbolic of defining people's life experiences. The salt plays an ambiguous role. On the one hand, the salt crystals which form around my work support the fine metal structures, but on the other hand, the salt is slowly biting into the

metal. This is symbolic of the way older people's salt influences young people.

My thesis contains the full development of my working process by looking at the organic growth of salt crystals over metal structures, and I am inspired by the constantly changing course of how crystallization impacts the metal. Through my thesis work, I expect to pass my feeling about the complicated relationship between myself and my family to the audience.

Sources and Research

1. About the Saying

Often when I communicate with my parents or other elders, they responded with the phrase, "I eat salt more than you eat rice", when we have different opinions. For some, they like to use this powerful saying to silence any dissenting opinion. In the Chinese culture, the salt-eating elders always regards themselves to be more experienced and superior, and they are the authority. When children hear the comparison of salt and rice from an adult, if they are smart, they would instinctively keep their mouth shut. Since many Asians find it hard to apply conflict management principles when it comes to handling differences with their parents, they feel the tension all the more.

It is reasonable to Chinese parents who may revert to treating the adult as a child. They continue to expect child-like deference and respect.

2. About Me

I was born in Lai'an, which is a little town in eastern Anhui Province, China, lying between the Yangtze River and the Huai River. It is under the administration of Chuzhou city.

I live in a typical Chinese family, all living generations of a family living under the same roof. I live with my parents and grandparents and I am the only child in my family because of the one child policy in China. Here are some disadvantages of the one child policy. For more than 30 years, China had adopted the social experiment, the One Child Policy. As the term suggest, every couple or family should only have one child. This is a law as well and parents who went against this and were caught had to pay hefty fine. Those who survived in the culture like me are called the “lost generation” while the children who were born under this policy are referred to as the “lonely generation”, according to Pulitzer-winning author, Mei Fong, who penned the book “One Child.”

As I know the policy is over, but the impact of the One Child Policy is still being felt by its citizens. Being an only child might give one the perks of having his or her toys for himself or herself and for getting all the attention and consideration from parents. However, it will be hard for the child to juggle between family life, career and care of parents, when parents are old and sickly. It is also hard for parents to let their only child go. Also, the way

some Chinese parents shower love on their grown-up child can be smothering. There is the art of letting go that is largely elusive to the old generation.

For my parents, I am their only child, and as such, they are very involved and controlling. My parents and grandparents pay a great deal of attention to me and aim to control me.

Family has long been a key component within Chinese society, and many aspects of Chinese life can be tied to honoring one's parents or ancestors. In modern China, every aspect of a child's life, including courses of study, careers, friends and free time is decided and managed by the parents and other relatives. There is a very close relationship between my family members and myself. All the family members would get together in our grandparents' house biggest festival holidays. They often have family meetings to talk about the personal affairs of the children. They care about every child in the family and they hope we will live well and be healthy. Because no matter how old we are, they still think we are just kids. In their eyes, they think that there are lot of things that we cannot handle. No matter what the reality is, how good we are doing, they still think that we are not capable at all.

Sometimes, I feel shame when I notice that I am still struggling with the relationship between me and my parents. It seems like I still stay in a fortress besieged. I don't know whose fault this is, but it is something that can not be changed. I feel it is kind like we

born with this too close relationship. It is like a natural relationship between parent and child.

As a student from China, I realize two sides of the significance of studying in the United States. On one hand, the environment is different in the US, where I receive a better education and experience a brand-new country with incredible new outlooks, customs and activities I have never seen before. On the other hand, I had to separate from my family to live independently and I had to learn to look after myself.

For me, this is a new chapter of my life, I found that studying abroad really brings out your independent nature. Being in a new place by myself can be overwhelming at times, and it tests my ability to adapt to diverse situations while being able to problem solve. However, it is hard for my parents to bear the separation. They are not ready to accept the fact that their child is no longer a child and capable of taking care of herself.

3. About Inspiration

Love Like Salt¹

BY [LISEL MUELLER](#)¹

It lies in our hands in crystals
too intricate to decipher
It goes into the skillet
without being given a second thought
It spills on the floor so fine
we step all over it
We carry a pinch behind each eyeball
It breaks out on our foreheads
We store it inside our bodies
in secret wineskins
At supper, we pass it around the table
talking of holidays and the sea.

¹ Mueller, Lisel. *Love like Salt*. Barnes & Noble, 1996.

I agree that love is just like salt, in the way we cannot live without it and in the way it acts in our lives and bodies. The collision of salt with love is explored fully in Lisel Mueller's poem "Love Like Salt," where salt, like love, is at times inexplicable, taken for granted, lost, and yet still an intrinsic part of both ourselves and our communal lives. I love the metaphor in this poem. Without salt, life has no savor, because without salt we are not human. It is the physical manifestation of the basic element of our lives. Salt is essential for life, and as the body cannot produce it itself, it has to be provided in the meals almost everyday. Without salt, our bodies become chemically unbalanced, our muscles and nervous system cease to function and eventually we die. We die eventually anyway of course, but salt keeps us going for a bit longer. It is why salt is important for our body. However, too much salt can be bad for our health.

I think my parents are my toughest and warmest shield, but the parent-child relationship is tricky. The relationship reminds me of the chemical reaction between salt and metal. My parent's love is like salt which is an indispensable component in the process of my growth.

Love Like Salt

In people's life, parents are our first teachers. They show us the way of life and teach us to be good human beings. We learn a lot from their experiences, as they are older and have life experience to share with us. We have all heard that experience is the best teacher. By using parents' experiences as a starting point, we accelerate our progress. We benefit from the knowledge and discoveries of our parents and seek the guidance from those who have gone before us. Yet, later in life we learn to figure things out on our own.

ABOUT WORK

DEVELOPMENT

1) ARTIST

Hilde De Decker²



Jewelry In A Jar

It all started with a true story: a gardener had lost his wedding ring in the field and found it a season after with a tomato grown inside it. The collection of jewelry artist Hilde De Decker inspired by this curious story she read in her local newspaper. Decker, Hilde de, and Apinya Oo Boonprakob. Hilde De Decker.

This combined with the growing concern over genetically manipulated food and our society's obsession with body decoration 'grew' into her organic collection of jewelry.

'Wedding ring turns up in potato after twenty years' - this was the starting point for Hilde

² Decker, Hilde de, and Apinya Oo Boonprakob. Hilde De Decker.

De Decker's project. Hilde De Decker's jewelry "gemstone" is a tomato. It grows and adapts to the shape of the jewel below, to become part of it. In this piece he explores how a vegetable reacts to precious metal; fitting the jewelry over the tender young fruit. Adjusting, intervening, leading, every week, or even every day, he creates jewelry following the rhythm of the vegetables.

Hilde De Decker's work inspired me a lot. Especially, the work 'For the Farmer and the Market Gardener'. This art piece became foremost an experience, an act, a development in time and space, which every aspect of the creative process and its moment. The most interesting part is the process of the artwork is constantly changing the tomato changed the shape in the metal flame, which happens as a natural consequence of their growth. The process of growing fascinates me.

Before getting started with my salt pieces, I had made a jewelry piece with pig intestine, which is very delicate. From that time, I started wondering about the qualities of salt, and its ability to preserve materials, which otherwise would quickly decay and disappear. I am inspired by a toy I played with when I was a child, where I came to know a chemistry art toy smallware about called 'Snow Christmas Tree.' This toy has a Christmas tree paper-cut cardboard and a base plate which contains the chemistry liquid kept in a small package bag. The edges of the cardboard Christmas tree have added drops of food coloring. After the magic solution has been drawn throughout the tree by capillary action, the solution begins to evaporate. The evaporation process is accelerated by the ammonia,

which evaporates more quickly than water. As the magic solution evaporates off of the tree, the crystals are left behind on the branches of the tree.



With my thesis work, I first tested the liquid chemical mixed solution with different shapes of cardboard paper-cut, and checked on how the salt crystal built on the paper tree and the time it takes, which heled me make better use of the tricky chemistry reaction on my artwork. After many liquid test, I began to experiment with different metals. Then I discovered steel mesh is the best choice for salt crystallization structures. The mesh gives more contact space for the evaporation and condensation to take place. I also found the color of the salt crystal to be intriguing.

2) Artist

Sigalit Landau



Salt Bride

Sigalit Landau's latest, "Salt Bride,"³ starts with a work of natural alchemy: a sort of time-lapse sculpture, in which a severe black gown submerged in the waters of the Dead Sea gradually turns sparkling white as crystals saltier than tears build across its surface. Her work gave me another angle to rethink about the relationship between me and my parents.

My parents love me so. They want to create a safe and beautiful castle for me their little princess. When I grew up, I noticed that their hopes are more like a dead sea rather than a

³ The Salt Years. 2016.

castle. The Dead Sea, also known as the Salt Sea. It is a hypersaline lake that is truly a unique place on this Earth. My parents keep telling me their life experience, trying to push me to do what they want for me. They give me too much salt. There is no life in the dead sea, because of the high level of salt. My parents help me resist the threats from the outside with their giving of 'salt,' thinking that this will ensure I float. I would then never worry about the risk from others and from life when I stay in their salt lake. They think I am still a little kid needing a life preserver in the water so that I can easily float in the "Dead Sea". As I know, floating in the Dead Sea is a relaxing experience, relieving a person of stress and allowing their entire body to rest in the water. However, I don't want to be floating in the salt sea any longer. Actually, resting and floating in the Dead Sea is the only thing a person can do. Because of the salt buoyancy a person can't swim or dive into the water. With these thoughts in mind, I imagined of my thesis installation piece, which used steel mesh pressed out in the shape of a human body. In addition, the fabric wall composition in my thesis is also inspired from these same thoughts. I use the canvas fabric and ply wood to create this wall piece. Firstly, I cut natural shaped holes in the wood panel. The canvas fabric is the glued to the wood surface after which I sewed steel wire rings on the fabric to build the special salt lake landscape.

I used the same elements in my necklace installation composition. The necklace installation was composed in two sections. One part is the necklace made with copper and steel mesh, the bottom section is a cuboid steel wire pedestal. The top side of the cuboid steel pedestal had a welded copper sheet which was hammered into a shape in the

outline contour of lake. The lower section of the pedestal was also welded with a flat copper sheet. This installation shows the entire process of salt crystallization, and reflects how my parents' salt impacts me. I put a vast quantity of salt on the bottom of the plate to build a salt mountain symbolizing that which comes from my parents. I filled the upside lake form with chemical salt liquid then hung the necklace over the lake after dipping it into the liquid. The salt liquid continued to crystallize itself and thus corroded the steel mesh. The two sections interact with each other. Like my parents and me we adapted to the frame that is set and interact within it.



Dead Sea

Three jewelry wall pieces created with cone shapes also supported the salt crystal concept. The cone shape was inspired from the hour glass sand clock. I piled steel mesh, circle mesh sheet and twine threads between each pair of cone sections. The cone shapes

became the containers for salt liquid and allowed the salt to crystallize in the space built between them. The three cone jewelry pieces are not wearable as wear-ability was not a primary goal. The material research and experimentation was the goal. I believe that wear-ability is a limited term, the jewelry functions as memory, as an emotion, as an art piece and not necessarily limited to its 'on-body' function.

In my art work, the salt crystals support the fine metal structures, though the salt is slowly biting into the metal at the same time. The organic growth of salt crystals over the art forms reveals a level of certainty and uncertainty. The works I created in salt and rusted steel mesh do not stay fixed in time, but transform themselves depending on how the salt attaches to the metal then corrupts the form. As an organic matter the salt crystal compositions will continue to transform which makes their life span dynamic and ever changing.

Conclusion

My reflection towards life is expressed through my thesis project exploring how life is simple as well as complex. I am responding to my life experiences through my art works. I present this view through jewelry, wearable installations, wall installation and sculpture, utilizing mixed media materials and different sizes.

I am happy people were interested in the process of continuous crystallization during my exhibition. I believe the art work I created for my thesis shows relationships that an audience needs to stimulate their collective imagination which will help them to understand the links in their life.

My art work became much more than beautiful pieces made of metal, and this development made me aware of a sense of challenge overcome, giving me self-confidence. To improve as an artist, I will never forget the challenges that I will meet in every stage. There are always people who have eaten more salt than me, and try to impose their salt on me. The exploration of the relationships in our lives is endless. My work will be continued after the thesis.

Bioblography

Mueller, Lisel. *Love like Salt*. Barnes & Noble, 1996.

Decker, Hilde de, and Apinya Oo Boonprakob. Hilde De Decker.

Cohen, Rona, et al. Sigalit Landau The Salt Years. Kerber, Christof, 2016.

Photos of exhibition



Image 1 Salty waves



Image 2 Salty waves



Image 3 Floating



Image 4 Floating



Image 5 Floating



Image 6 Floating



Image 7 Slat Lake



Image 8 Salty Waves And Salt Lake



Image 9 Fall



Image 10



Image 11 Bracelet 1

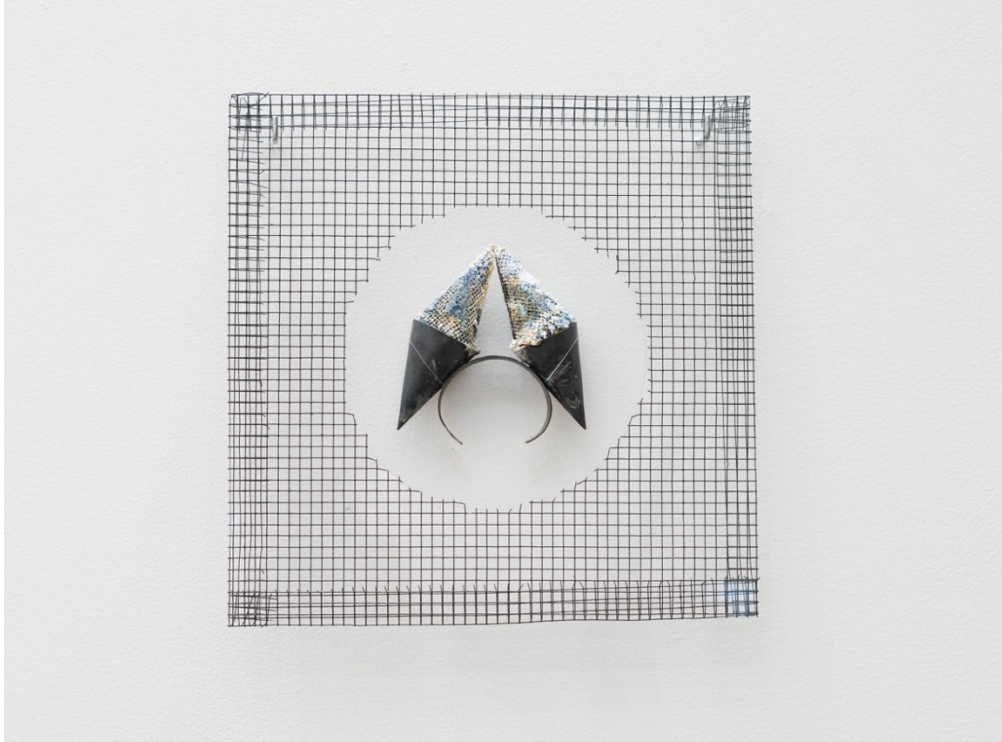


Image 12 Bracelet 2

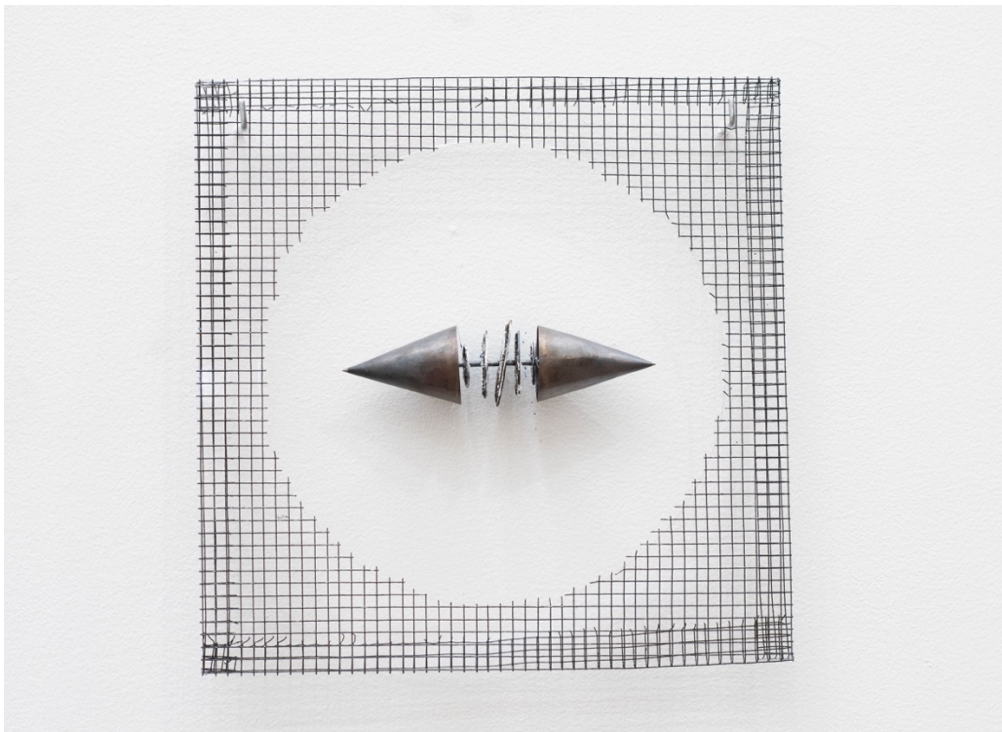


Image 13 Brooch 1

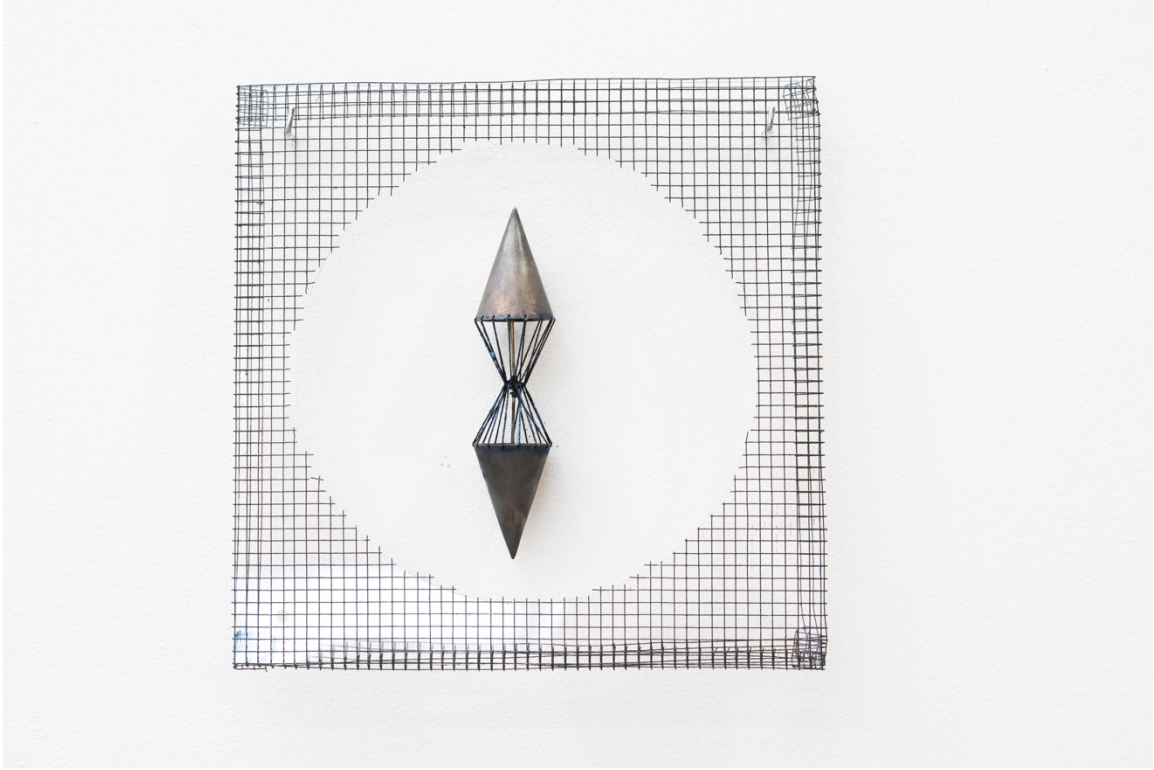


Image 14 Brooch 2